

Unrestrained Anger

Destructive Decisions Series, May 7 & 8, 2022 (Mother's Day) | Judges 15:14-17 (15:1-20)
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HOW CAN WE RESTRAIN OUR UNRESTRAINED ANGER?

Unrestrained anger can produce moral failures in our lives. What is a moral failure?

Moral failures happen when we make destructive decisions: We do something we are strongly expected not to do, or we fail to do something that we are strongly expected to do.

We make those destructive decisions when we're bored and off God's purpose for our lives or feel entitled and let our desires take over.

The destructive decisions we make have life-altering consequences; we can lose everything.

Last week I described moral failure as being like a bomb exploding in our lives.

We are studying the life of Samson, a judge in ancient Israel before there was a king.

I said that Samson reminded me of Wile E. Coyote who spends his life chasing Road Runner.

Many of Wile E. Coyote's plans involve dynamite. But every time Wile E. Coyote lights a stick of dynamite, it goes off in his own hand.

Samson is like Wile E. Coyote because he makes one destructive decision after another that has consequences and warns of bigger explosions to come.

In so many ways, moral failure can be described as being like a bomb going off in our lives.

Some explosions, like the one that happened in Beirut in August of 2020, are bigger than we expect.

A massive amount of ammonium nitrate was being stored at a warehouse in the port of Beirut.

Ammonium nitrate can be used in fertilizers or in legitimate ways as an explosive.

If it's stored properly, ammonium nitrate is safe.

But in August of 2020, after storing the ammonium nitrate safely for six years, there was a fire. The heat from the fire caused one explosion. That explosion caused a much bigger explosion.

The blast killed hundreds. It ripped apart a large part of the city and was felt in Cyprus.¹

The blast was more like a small atomic bomb than like a large typical explosion.

It is one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in history. I doubt anyone expected that.

Some explosions are bigger than we expect.

Unrestrained anger can lead to unexpectedly large explosions.

When we become angry, we quickly stop thinking clearly.

We perceive a threat as being bigger than it is.

We become convinced that we are right and righteous, that action is urgent and justified.

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/beirut-explosion-what-happened-11596590426>

Our anger spirals out of control, our destructive decisions spiral out of control, we damage ourselves along with those we intended to harm and those we did not intend to harm.

When our anger is unrestrained, we can lose everything: jobs, friends, spouses, and families. We can quickly lose our future, and we can easily lose our freedom to legal consequences.

We return to the life of Samson today to see what unrestrained anger looked like for him.

As we do, we will come away with tools and hope for restraining our anger.

SAMSON'S UNRESTRAINED ANGER EXPLODED

In anger, Samson released 300 foxes on the Philistine crops.

Last week, we learned that Samson intended to marry a Philistine woman, but the wedding feast went badly as she told their guests a secret Samson had shared with her in confidence. Angry at her betrayal, Samson returned to his parents' home.

It seems that Samson cooled down over time. Somehow, he expected that his fiancée would still be waiting for him, so he went to her house to be with her.

Her father met him at the door and shared the disappointing news that he had given his oldest daughter to one of Samson's drinking buddies to be his wife. He offered to give Samson his younger, prettier daughter instead. Samson was furious.

He planned to take his anger out on the Philistines. It was wheat season, so Samson caught 300 foxes, tied them together by the tail, and put a lit torch between them. The frightened animals set fire to the fields, the grain that had already been harvested, and the olive orchards.

Samson's anger exploded. Then it spiraled downward.

In rage, Samson crippled multiple Philistine men.

Samson struck at the foundation of the Philistine's agrarian economy.

The Philistines were furious. They investigated and discovered that Samson had done it.

They held Samson's would-be father-in-law responsible for Samson's actions.

They burned his house down with the family inside, killing everyone. That's Philistine anger.

Samson responded with rage. The Hebrew used in this passage implies that Samson may have crippled a number of Philistine men. Samson paid the Philistines back for what they had done to the family in Timnah.

Interestingly, Samson was willing to end the feud at this point.

He went to the land of Judah and stayed in the wilderness by a rock.

Samson's rage had exploded. However, things got even worse.

In revenge, Samson killed over 1,000 Philistine soldiers.

The Philistines responded to Samson's violence by sending an army to Judah.

The Philistines announced that they had come to capture Samson and do to him as he had done to them. (That's pagan thinking.)

Ironically, the people of Judah wanted peace with the Philistines at any cost. They were willing to hand over their champion and would-be deliverer in order to keep the peace.

Judah sent 3,000 armed men to the spot where Samson was camped.

They told him that they planned to bind him and hand him over to the Philistines.
When they promised to hand him over alive, Samson allowed himself to be taken and bound.

Now we come to Judges 15:14-17:

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men. And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men." As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi.

Samson met the Philistines at Lehi, and the Philistines were already celebrating and shouting. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson; the new ropes restraining him melted away. Samson picked up a jawbone from a freshly dead donkey and used it to kill 1,000 Philistines. Samson's revenge exploded leaving a mountain of dead people.

Look at the trail of destruction!

There is a trail of bodies.

The easy relationship between the Israelites and the Philistines was beginning to crumble.

But we see clearly now that Samson was operating on the same values that his enemies were: I do to you what you do to me. That's pagan thinking.

That's what unrestrained anger looks like. How do we restrain our own unrestrained anger?

Here are **THREE WAYS TO RESTRAIN UNRESTRAINED ANGER:**

1. **Look Under the Surface to Understand Your Anger**

Anger gives us energy to act.

Anger is an intense, basic emotion we feel in response to something we think is wrong.

Anger fills our bodies with hormones. Our blood pressure and heart rate go up.

We have increased energy because we are getting ready to act.²

Anger produces signs and behaviors in us you can see if you look closely.

We scowl, frown, and glare.

We tend to sweat, lean forward, and puff up.

We may clench our jaws, tighten our fists, and raise our voices.³

Anger comes in multiple intensities.

Anger starts with mild annoyance but can quickly become frustration or exasperation.

² <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-anger-5120208>

³ <https://www.paulekman.com/universal-emotions/what-is-anger/>

Anger can become confrontational or even bitter and vengeful before ending in fury.⁴
Anger comes in various intensities. Samson felt them all.

Anger is like an iceberg in that there is more under the surface.

Our anger is what's above the surface. That's what we see and know.

However, anger almost always has root causes that are under the surface. We feel threatened, exhausted, disappointed, offended, hungry, etc. Those feelings surface as anger.

Until we wrap our heads around and deal with what's going on under the surface, anger tends to build and become difficult to resolve.⁵

Clearly, Samson did not understand his anger.

There was a lot going on under the surface for Samson including betrayal, frustration, disappointment, and fear.

His anger came in every flavor imaginable including bitterness, vengeance, and fury.

Anger took over his body, and his thinking was completely clouded by it.

He felt great energy to act, but his action was ultimately destructive and not purposeful.

Samson needed to restrain his anger and channel the energy for righteousness and justice.

To restrain unrestrained anger, we have to address what's going on under the surface.

We need to ask what's really making us angry and address it.

We need to monitor the intensity of the anger that we feel because some kinds of anger control us and cannot be controlled by us for righteous ends.

We need to look at the symptoms we're showing. If we're screaming, we're out of control!

To restrain our anger, we have to address what's going on under the surface.

2. Expect Your Anger to Accomplish Its Purpose

God's righteous anger (wrath) has a purpose.

God's righteous anger or wrath is his righteous and just response condemning moral evil.

Nahum 1:2 in the Old Testament reads,

... the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

Then in **Romans 1:18** Paul writes,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

When I talk about God's righteous anger and his wrath, it's easy to push back and say, "My God is a loving God and could never be angry or wrathful."

Moral evil wrecks creation and brings catastrophic brokenness to everything and everyone. Excusing moral evil would be unloving, unrighteous, and unjust.

God's wrath is poured out on the sin placed on Jesus on the cross. In **2 Corinthians 5:21** Paul writes,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-anger-iceberg/>

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Then **1 John 4:10** reminds us that Jesus died in our place,

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

That's love. God's righteous anger has a purpose.

Righteous human anger even has purposes.

Righteous anger is given to us to respond to moral evil.

When we see and sense moral evil, we are meant to confront it and stop it.

Righteous human anger should lead us to heal broken relationships and seek reconciliation.

Righteous human anger should lead us to seek justice when we find injustice and to seek righteousness when we see unrighteousness.

Righteous human anger has purposes.

God was stoking Samson's righteous anger.

Samson, like Israel, felt no discomfort living as a Philistine dominated by Philistines.

God wanted Samson to be less comfortable, to seek righteousness, to call Israel to faithfulness and resistance, and to throw off the yoke of Philistine oppression and pagan culture.

Samson's anger could have led him to confront evil and seek righteousness, justice, and holiness. That's what God wanted.

Righteous human anger has purposes; Samson just missed them.

However, most human anger is unrighteous and sinfully out of control.

Most human anger comes from our brokenness and our selfishness.

We usually turn up the heat of our anger to intensities that control us.

Anger frequently leads us to do things that are destructive rather than constructive.

To restrain unrestrained anger, expect your anger to accomplish its purpose.

Examine your motives.

Admit when your anger has gone awry for selfish and ungodly purposes.

Hold yourself accountable for righting a real wrong in the right way.

To restrain our anger, we must demand that it accomplish its God-given purpose.

3. Lengthen the Fuse on The Bomb of Your Anger

The Bible reminds us that we must do something to restrain our otherwise unrestrained anger.

The Proverbs repeatedly warn us about the life-altering consequences of unrestrained anger.

Proverbs 14:17,

A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.

The New Testament speaks repeatedly about anger, even calling it a work of the flesh.

James 1:19-20 says,

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Unrestrained anger leads to destructive decisions and life-altering consequences.

Unrestrained anger leads to moral failures.

William Bickford reminds us that we need time to think.

Bickford lived in the Cornwall region of England in the early 19th century.

Cornwall was famous for mining, and mining involved lots and lots of blasting.

Miners would set gun powder charges, then explode them. Accidents happened frequently.

Bickford saw the problem. Miners needed reliable time between lighting a charge and the explosion. They needed a fuse. Bickford designed a fuse made up of multiple threads surrounding yarn infused with gunpowder.

Miners could light the resulting fuse and know how long it would take the fuse to ignite the explosion based on the length of the fuse.

Today, the Dyno Nobel facility in Simsbury makes the successor to Bickford's fuses.⁶

A fuse that delays an explosion represented a huge leap forward in mining safety.

How do we create a fuse, a timer, a delay on our anger? How do we make the fuse we have longer, so that we don't make destructive decisions that lead to life-altering consequences?

There are proven, wise ways to give ourselves the margin to restrain our anger.

Ensuring that we take a Sabbath day each week helps. Being exhausted means that the brakes on our anger are gone and that we are more likely to vent fully our anger. God wired us to need a Sabbath rest, so he commanded that we take a Sabbath each week. Take a Sabbath.

Maintaining regular spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, community, and worship keeps us spiritually healthy. We know who God is, who we are, what God wants from us, and what God wants for us. Spiritual health is reflected in emotional health. Keep regular spiritual disciplines.

Keep a healthy lifestyle. Eating well, sleeping well, and exercising all make us healthier physically, and physical health contributes to emotional health as well.

There are proven, wise ways to lengthen the fuse on the bomb of anger in our lives.

One of the wisest ways to add the margin we need to restrain our anger is to remember that we ourselves are naturally objects of wrath.

Anger makes us think that other people are the real sinners, the rightful objects of God's wrath, and, therefore, the rightful objects of our wrath.

That makes us the hands of God's retribution and vengeance, justice we are eager to hand out once anger takes the form of bitterness and fury in our minds.

⁶ <https://www.cornwall-calling.co.uk/famous-cornish-people/bickford.htm>

However, we're missing the critically important insight that we too are the rightful objects of wrath. We are sinners, rightfully subject to God's wrath. God poured out onto his Son, Jesus, the wrath that should have fallen to us. We aren't righteous on our own; we are forgiven.

As forgiven objects of wrath, how can we not forgive others?

Remembering that makes it easier to lengthen the fuse on the bomb of our own anger.

What will we do with our unrestrained anger?

Let's look under the surface to understand our anger.

May we expect our anger to accomplish its purpose and lengthen the fuse on our anger.

In so doing, we will destructive decisions, moral failures, and their life-altering consequences.

Let's restrain our anger.